

# Church Etiquette

The Church is perhaps one of the last social institutions where dignity, protocol, respect, and reverence are maintained. This is primarily because when we come to the church and its services we are entering the Kingdom of God on earth, His habitation, and we choose to honor this sacred place by our attentiveness to what is proper and ordered. We have the opportunity to reflect the image of Christ within us by our actions. *“You are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation”* (1 Peter 2:9).

This class is meant for personal reflection, not as a means of judging others. Keep in mind that there are different traditions even among the Christian faithful. We come to church to pray and worship God above all else, and that should be our only focus.

During this class I have listed some of the things worshippers need to know about respectful and reverent behavior while in Chapel Service. I encourage all congregation members, couples and families to make use of this valuable resource.

## Definition of Etiquette

*Church etiquette is a set of rules that govern behavior in the house of God. It comes from the same principle as the etiquette that governs behavior in polite society. With that said let's look at some basic rules of etiquette.*

- Prepare your heart for Sunday. Don't schedule your Sundays so that you are holding God to the clock. We run harried all six days, on Sunday we need to put your clock and calendar to rest on Sunday. *Rest – Plan nothing Do nothing.*
- Give yourself time. Plan Saturday night to leave on time Sunday morning. Don't be in a mad rush cursing your children, frothing at your mate, violating the law. Let nothing abscond with your Sundays.
- Come on time ~ Punctuality is consideration of another man's schedule. Even though we start on time, those who come late can create a distraction. And remember that worship involves learning but it also involves all of the life of the body of Christ. The emotional experience of singing and worship is as vital to us as the intellectual experience of learning and the volitional experience of obeying. Be in place when the service begins.
- Be respectful of others if you have a crying child. A child who screams at the top of his lungs is no problem as long as the mother takes him out. But a continually fretful, whining child becomes a constant drip unto frustration and insanity. Don't let your child be a distraction. You can go to the fellowship hall near the bathroom. We are working to have a TV feed of the service in this room. While your child's voice is precious to you, he's probably not to others wanting to hear the service.
- Once you come into the sanctuary and the service begins, do not talk; especially in the back. In a sanctuary as large as ours you may think that you are not being heard but to those in your vicinity, it sounds like a Rangers game. Don't be a distraction to those around you.
- If you should come in late for some reason, sit in the back and don't parade down front. All eyes will turn from the Bible to the entrance of the royal train.

- Do not “fiddle” with wrappers on a piece of candy or gum. That drives people around you nigh unto violence at the continual crinkling of cellophane. Stick candy in your yapper prior to the service. If you need a lozenge during the service, then be quick.
- Our morning services last about 2 hour. From 11:15-1:00. Leave when the Pastor says, “You are dismissed.” Leaving early takes the edge off of the finality of a service. Staying brings closure to all of the time together. Be respectful.
- If a child (not a baby) is brought to service then the child must behave. If a child is brought to church it is to train them in adult ways. Playing a computer game defeats the purpose as well as being disrespectful. It also teaches a child to be irreverent. Doodling is one thing. Playing a game is quite another.
- Respect the building. Do you know that on Monday mornings our C/A has to pick up the mints that are spit out and have stuck to the carpet or floor? Clean up after yourself as your mama taught you. And you know what? Our bathrooms are nastier after Sunday than the Carolina **Panthers** football team **stadium** bathrooms are after a game. Habits build character. Respect the property of others.

### Church Building ~ The Sanctuary

Our Lord said, “*For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them.*”(Matthew 18:20)

- Arrive on time for service. That means at least five minutes early. Late arrivals should enter quietly and stand in the back until an appropriate break in the ceremony allows them to enter.
- *A church clean* ~ This is a way to honor God. Remember the outside of the church reflects the inside of the church. Make certain that trash is picked up, that the flowerbeds are tended, and that nothing unsightly mars the look of God’s house.
- *Pulpit* ~ Only the minister or invited speakers are allowed to speak from the center pulpit. Only the minister, or persons authorized by the minister should ever be in the pulpit. All other speakers taking part in the worship service should use side lecterns and podiums. Children should be taught at young ages that this is a sacred spot and can never be used as a play area.
- *Communion Table* ~ The Communion table is used for one of two holy sacraments (ceremonies or rites). Ministers and others who are in charge of the Communion service are the only persons permitted to use it. Personal items should never be placed on the Communion table.
- *Church Bibles and Hymnals* ~ Bibles and Hymnals that are placed in pews are to be treated with care and respect. They should not be written on or used to dispose of gum. The bindings should be cared for; the spines of Bibles and Hymnals should be protected. They are the property of the church and should not be taken home by parishioners. Parishioners should let the church leadership know if Bibles and Hymnals are in need of repair.

- *Talking during Church* ~ Personal conversation with friends and family should be avoided during the service. This is a time to commune with God. It just isn't appropriate to have a conversation with others during the services. Besides being disrespectful towards God, it is rude towards the other people in the church who are trying to worship. Talk to God while in church through your prayers, hymns, and thanksgiving, and to your friends in the hall afterwards. If it is life and death, then go to church early and talk beforehand. If it isn't.....wait. It is rude and inconsiderate to those around you. They have not come to hear your personal business conversations - keep it that way.
- Don't make unnecessary noises. Tear off your check before church. Unwrap your cough drops beforehand. Put the children's snacks into a ziploc bag. Adjust the velcro on your shoes after church. It is the little things that are loud and disruptive. Take a moment and prepare for a respectful and meaningful time.
- **LITTLE ONES**
  - Taking restless little ones out is a different matter. If a child is disruptive, take him/her quickly and quietly out of church, just long enough to settle him down, then return to the Service. Follow the rules for entering late: not during readings, sermons.
- **Children in Church** ~ *Christ said, "Let the little children come to Me, and do not forbid them; for such is the kingdom of heaven"* (Matthew 19:14). . It is never appropriate to allow a child to run down the aisles, play loudly, or carry toys that make noise. It is possible for young children to remain in church throughout a service if they are taught to be quiet and respectful. We have a cry rooms or nurseries for those who are too small to be quiet throughout the whole Service. Please be respectful to those around you if your child becomes fussy or out of control, and remove him from the Service quickly. Don't get me wrong, we love children, but sometimes they have needs that must be addressed immediately. Go address them - in the nursery. Everyone loves a child, but they should not be a distraction in church. Eventually, children will be able to spend longer times in the Service. That is where they should be, but remember the reason for coming to church is to pray and worship. Plan to have your children use the restroom and get a drink before church begins, and don't allow them to come and go continually. Consider bringing your children into the church at a time when the Service is finished to "practice" church behavior. Teach them that they are visiting God's very special house, and they will need to have very special manners there.
- **Snacks for Children** ~ You can always tell where young children have been sitting in the church. The tell-tale signs are graham cracker crumbs, Cheerios, and animal crackers. Parents often bring snacks and a cup of fruit juice along for children during church. And for young children (0-2 years old), this is fine. But by the time children are 3-4 years old, they should be able to make it through Service without eating anything, and by the time they reach seven, they should be fine. For those children who get snacks, try to keep the snack mess down to a minimum. The floor shouldn't be covered with Cheerios! If a very young child needs a snack, please clear away any leftover pieces
- *Leaving Before Dismissal* ~ Leaving church before the Dismissal - besides being rude - deprives us of a blessing. Worship has a beginning ("Blessed is the Kingdom...") and an

end ("Let us depart in peace..."). We live in a fast-paced world where we seem to be hurrying from place to place. But in God's presence, we need to make every attempt to fight this pressure to move on to the next thing on the day's agenda. We deprive ourselves of blessings by not being still and participating in God's holiness. (Leaving to quiet an infant or other emergencies are acceptable exceptions.)

- **Leaving Church**

Typically, you are not supposed to leave the sanctuary during prayers, the reading of the Scripture or the Sermon. You are to remain in church until the *benediction* (final prayer of the service) has been said.

However, there will be times when a person really needs to leave the sanctuary. When this occurs, please do so as discreetly as possible, with the least amount of disruption to the service and the least amount of distraction to your fellow brothers and sisters who are worshipping. If you must leave the sanctuary during church service, do not pass in front of the pulpit. The following times are usually good if one has to leave or re-enter the sanctuary:

- During a hymn.
- During the collection of the offerings.
- If at all possible, a person **should not** leave or re-enter the sanctuary:
- During the opening of the worship service.
- During the reading of God's Holy Word.
- During a prayer.
- During the sermon.
- During the Lord's Supper.

There are, of course, a number of exceptions to all of the above.

- ❖ **When is an appropriate time to eat in the sanctuary?**

- You should never eat in the sanctuary. If you have a medical condition which requires you to eat at a specific time, leave the sanctuary and go to the fellowship hall and eat. Remember this is another way of respecting the sanctity of God's house. Use of these items is too casual in church and runs the risk of ruining church property and wasting tithes made to God on repairs that would not otherwise be necessary. While the chewing gum rule is sometimes broken, its use should be kept to a minimum, and it should always be disposed of properly (not under pews, in Bibles or on other church property).

- Communion is reserved for believers who wish to partake.

- ❖ **Standing ~ We stand for....**

- Call To Worship because this the opening of the worship experience. We are participation in a call and responds activity. It allows us to participate in the purpose of our coming together
- Opening Hymn because this a song of praise to God; We are praising God in song

- Doxology because the doxology is our hymn of praise to God: (The doxology is song in is some church at the beginning and the end of the worship service). We should always stand in reverence to God when the Doxology is played
- Offertory not only requires that you stand but you should also participate in giving. Many times people sit during the offering. You should only sit if the church you are attending is passing a tray to collect the offering, but if you are asked to bring your offering you should get up and take it to the table, plate or place it in the box. Giving is a part of worship. If you don't have anything still get up and walk around, this allows for the flow of the offering to move quickly. It is difficult walking over people during the worship experience. It could even quench some people's spirit during giving.
- The Invitation of Christian Discipleship is a time when individual are invited to come and be a part of the household of faith.
- **Refrain from reserving seats.** Allow others to sit as they come into the church, and especially make room for visitors so they will feel welcome. Avoid claiming the outside seat in an empty pew. Claiming the outside seat forces others to climb over you in order to take a seat for worship. For those of you who just can't handle sitting in the middle of the pew (or those with small children who may need to make a fast exit -], take the outside aisle spot and graciously allow those coming after you to go past (by moving out for them so they can get by). Also be nice to our Pews - We should treat them respectfully.
- **Language that Honors God** - Part of your commitment to God is to use language that honors God. Swearing in the sanctuary or any other part of the church is forbidden.

#### ❖ **Walking**

- Never walk in front or across the front of the altar and/or the pulpit area during worship
- Never walk when individuals are reading the scriptures or during prayer
- If you are walking and someone begins to read the scripture or begins to pray, STOP and stand until they are finish

#### • **Sitting ~ *When is the appropriate time to sit***

- Prelude
- If not at the altar, during prayer
- Announcements
- Greeting of Visitors

#### ❖ **Offering ~ *When and where is the appropriate place and time, to prepare your offering*** (Get money from your parents, fill out the offering envelopes etc...)?

- It is appropriate You should take care of all business before entering the sanctuary (use the restroom, write out your offering envelope, get funds from parents if needed ect..) Once you have entered the sanctuary, you should regard it as time spent with God. You should not talk, walk, chew gum, text message or write notes during the worship experience.

- ***Christian clothing ~ Sunday Dress***

- Dress for church in a manner that shows respect. Whenever we are preparing to come to church, we should remember that we will be entering the House of God. This requires that we dress modestly and with reverence. We are not just spiritual creatures. Our bodies outside reflect what we feel inside. Your dress reflects your heart. Be neat and properly attired. You are going to church to fellowship with and honor God. We should dress modestly, not in a flashy way that would bring attention to ourselves. Our dress should always be becoming of a Christian - especially at church. A woman cloth should not be too low, too high or too tight (clothing that expose the breast, very low cleavage, upper thigh, and midriff are a no go). A man should not be sloppy (Male pants which hang below the buttock ~ No Go). A young person should not draw attention to themselves (T-shirts with inappropriate slogans and symbols~ No Go). Church is to look upwards. Remember; use your best judgment and good taste when dressing for church. After all, you don't go to be seen by everyone else - you go to meet and worship God.

*Come as you are???*

This invitation, "Come as you are," has unfortunately evolved over the years into an invitation to literally roll out of a cave and come as you are. The above list of church etiquette tips is intended to serve not as a rule of protocol but as a gentle reminder to worshipers that good manners and proper etiquette are important in the house of God.

- ❖ ***The Benediction ~ Why is it important to stay in the worship service until the benediction is given?***

- At the end of the worship experience, the pastor or preacher will administer the prayer of benediction. It is important to receive the benedictional prayer. The benediction is a prayer that God may bestow certain blessings on His people.

In Old Testament times, a regular part of the Temple service was pronouncing the benediction. The form of the priestly benediction was prescribed in the law “The Lord bless you and keep you; / The Lord make His face shine upon you, And be gracious to you; / The Lord lift up his countenance upon you, And give you peace” (Num. 6:24–26).

- The benediction many call the “Apostolic Benediction” is often used at the conclusion of a Christian worship service “The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen” (2 Cor. 13:14).

- ***When is an appropriate time to use your cell phone?***

Cell phones and texting are never allowed in the church. If you have a situation that requires you to keep your electronic device on, turn it on silent or vibrate and answer it outside if needed.(

remember, sometime In a quiet of church a phone on vibrate can be heard). Therefore, try to sit near the exit so that leaving for an emergency will not be a distraction to others. Otherwise, turn off your phone before entering the sanctuary. NEVER answer the phone in worship or in meetings and begin a full conversation with your head lowered. (WE HEAR YOU)

**Texting** is not only distracting to those around you, but it is downright sacrilegious. We are to “in humility receive the word implanted” and “as newborn babes long for the pure milk of the word.” Texting when one should be listening is a sinful and dishonoring thing in the presence of the explanation of Holy Scripture. In a court of law if one’s cell phone rings or one is seen texting, they will be fined for contempt. How much more disrespectful is it to Him who is the very source of law? Texting and talking should be saved for outside of the church. If you are anticipating an emergency call, sit on the aisle near the back and quietly slip outside and answer the call.

- Don't fall asleep in church. If you are that tired, stay home. Better yet, go to bed earlier on Saturday night and it won't be an issue! If you absolutely struggle to stay awake, it is rude to the speaker or pastor. You can make an effort to stay awake by doing small things to keep your mind awake. Sit up straight. Take notes. Wiggle your toes. Chew gum. Consider the principles presented and how they would apply to your life. These keep your mind moving and help to keep sleep at bay.
- **Church Banquets** ~ Often, in order to serve a large group of people at the same time, caterers will preset the banquet tables with the first course. *Before beginning to eat* it's important to remember to wait for everyone to be seated and for the blessing of the food. If there is a program, please remember to listen politely instead of having side conversations that will distract others from hearing. Remember the context in which this banquet is being held; since it is a parish event, dress respectfully and modestly.

Ultimately, we might mess up some of the above. But I think if we did, God would say the same thing we say at our house when somebody spills something: “No big deal.” Because it’s not about receiving the bread properly or leaving church early to get to work, it’s about Christ.